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RWANDA

SUCCESS STORY

Women Farmers experience Economic Growth thanks to USAID-funded Trainings



Working with women farmers to achieve profitable growth addresses their immediate capital needs and promotes empowerment.



Pictured from top to bottom: (L) Agritesco cooperative members Beata Mutesi, Agnes Karombe, Console Munganyinka, Jamima Mukawiringiye, and Claudine Uwimana; (R) Twitezimbere cooperative members Patricie Mukarunziga, Annonciate Musabwamana, and Esperance Kakuze

Photos: Portia C. Allen

The USAID Post Harvest Handling and Storage (PHHS) project is improving the competitiveness of smallholder beans and maize farmers in Rwanda by addressing post-harvest inefficiencies while directly connecting smallholder farmers to formal buyers. In collaboration with the World Food Program's Purchase for Progress training initiative, PHHS is implementing Sell More for More (SMFM), a comprehensive capacity-building program to improve the ability of beans and maize cooperatives to meet buyer requirements. SMFM includes a Training of Trainers component, which is facilitated by "STICKS" or banners (see top left photo). Initial trainees use "STICKS" to record their success in training other cooperative members on post-harvest handling techniques. In October 2012, the "STICKS" were highlighted as an innovative data collection tool at a Feed the Future East Africa Regional Workshop; and in December 2012, SMFM received InterAction's Best Practices and Innovations Award.

The vast majority of post-harvest activities in Rwanda are managed by women; therefore, they have a significant role in reducing post-harvest losses. As a result, the SMFM training requires at least 50% participation by women; and by the end of September 2012, PHHS had built the capacity of over 22,000 women small-holder farmers. Women farmers in the Agritesco and Twitezimbere cooperatives in the Eastern Province demonstrate the significant gender impact achieved by SMFM. During a site visit in October 2012, the women members emphasized that before SMFM, their post-harvest losses were high and they were affected by seasonal price variations that resulted in low prices paid to them at harvest (e.g. spot selling to itinerant traders). Following the SMFM trainings, these women farmers are now able to produce a higher quality product that can be sold at a premium price; and are empowered to establish more direct relationships with formal buyers (through their cooperatives). This has served as a foundation for building a dry storage unit, providing credit to members and improving market information.

Vice President Associate Musabwamana (pictured left) of the Twitezimbere cooperative recalls, "Before the SMFM trainings, I was not yielding a profit from the crops I was growing; having learned post-harvest handling techniques through the SMFM trainings, I am now harvesting around 300 kilograms of maize [an increase from 50 kilograms produced before the trainings] and making some profit." This welcomed profit is freeing up money for investment in Associate's family's healthcare, her children's education, small-scale business investments and personal savings.

In the remaining months of the project, PHHS will introduce and strengthen SMFM trainings by developing the "EMPOWER" training model which focuses on gender. "EMPOWER" seeks to support women members in defining income planning strategies and determining household spending priorities in order to address gender-based inequities in household decision making. The addition of this training module will facilitate women farmer's improved long-term management of their income for years to come.